**Neglect**

*R. T. Smith*

**Is the scent of apple boughs smoking  
in the woodstove what I will remember  
of the Red Delicious I brought down, ashamed**

**that I could not convince its limbs to render fruit?  
Too much neglect will do that, skew the sap's  
passage, blacken leaves, dry the bark and heart.**

**I should have lopped the dead limbs early  
and watched each branch with a goshawk's eye,  
patching with medicinal pitch, offering water,**

**compost and mulch, but I was too enchanted  
by pear saplings, flowers and the pasture,  
too callow to believe that death's inevitable**

**for any living being unloved, untended.  
What remains is this armload of applewood  
now feeding the stove's smolder. Splendor**

**ripens a final time in the firebox, a scarlet  
harvest headed, by dawn, to embers.  
Two decades of shade and blossoms - tarts**

**and cider, bees dazzled by the pollen,  
spare elegance in ice - but what goes is gone.  
Smoke is all, through this lesson in winter**

**regret, I've been given to remember.  
Smoke, and Red Delicious apples redder  
than a passing cardinal's crest or cinders.**